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Africa's South-South relations: Mining and railway lines in Mozambique

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■ Jana Hönke
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Africa's South-South relations

For instance: Mining and railway lines in Mozambique

■ Hard coal from the mine in the Moatize district is shipped from the port of the Mozambican coastal town of Beira (Photo: Mark Zannoni / Shutterstock.com).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Africa experienced a fundamental change: While development aid and foreign investment used to come mainly from the West, now economic relations with the emerging countries of the global South, including China and Brazil, became increasingly important. The deepening and expansion of these relations led to a geographical reorientation, which was accompanied by a growing influence of countries and companies from the South. The mining industry is an example of this development. Of the ten companies in this sector that were world leaders in terms of market capitalisation in 2018, four were based in so-called „emerging economies.“¹ As early as the end of the Cold War and particularly in the 2000s due to an economic outlook of high international commodity prices, the expansion of companies in the South engaged in the mining or processing of raw materials started to gain pace. Africa in particular was the target of these efforts.

Today, it is often debated whether emerging actors of the South will integrate themselves into the existing liberal world order or rather challenge it. In this context, the question is also raised as to whether economic cooperation with governments, companies, and investors in the South offers the African continent greater advantages than traditional North-South relations – not least with regard to the aspect of equality between the partners involved.



Many scientific contributions see either South-South solidarity as an opportunity and alternative, while others dismiss it and only see neo-colonialism in a new guise. Yet one-sided representations do not go far enough. As it will be shown in the following, it is worth to take a closer look at the idea of „South-South relations“, and at what the various actors in politics, business, and society actually mean when they claim the idea of „South-South relations“ for themselves – and what practical consequences that can have.

Brazil's South-South cooperation

During the presidencies of Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), Brazilian politics promoted alternative international relations between equal partners in the Global South.² The „South-South cooperation“ discourse promoted by them had three core elements in relation to Africa:

- **Solidarity:** An altruistic attitude towards Africa, accompanied by moral concerns to help Africans with a range of common historical, economic and social struggles.
- **Affinity:** A mutual empathy resulting from the cultural influence of African slaves and their descendants in Brazil. More specifically in the case of the Portuguese-speaking African countries, these affinities are also given by a common language and overlapping colonial experiences.
- **Tropical technologies:** In the areas of politics, economics, development policies, and technology, it was stressed that Brazilian approaches and concepts could be transferred to African countries in light of similar geographical and social conditions.

This South-South discourse, which accompanied and vaulted the Brazilian commitment to Africa, was by no means all „cast in the same mould“. Rather, it was interpreted and translated into practice in diverse ways according to the ideas, expectations, and goals of different actors.

Vale and its foreign relations: The example of Mozambique

Vale is one of the world's largest mining companies and has its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. Since 2011, it has been the main extractor of mineral resources in Mozambique. A former executive who

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■ Fig. 1: Cargo ship in the port of Nacala (Photo: Eric Cezne).



■ Fig. 2: Railway station on the railway line in the Nacala Logistics Corridor (NLC) (Photo: Eric Cezne).

RECOMMENDED READING

J. Hönke: Transnational Companies and Security Governance. Hybrid Practices in a Postcolonial World. London 2013.

J. Hönke, I. Cuesta-Fernandez: Mobilising Security and Logistics through an African Port. A Controversies Approach to Infrastructure. *Mobilities* (2018), 13, 2, 246-60. DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2017.1417774.

E. Cezne: Forging Transnational Ties from Below: Challenging the Brazilian Mining Giant Vale S.A. across the South Atlantic. DOI: 10.1016/j.exis.2019.10.007

■ Fig. 3 (right): On the railway line, the local population offers its goods for sale, mainly fruit and vegetables (Photo: Eric Cezne).

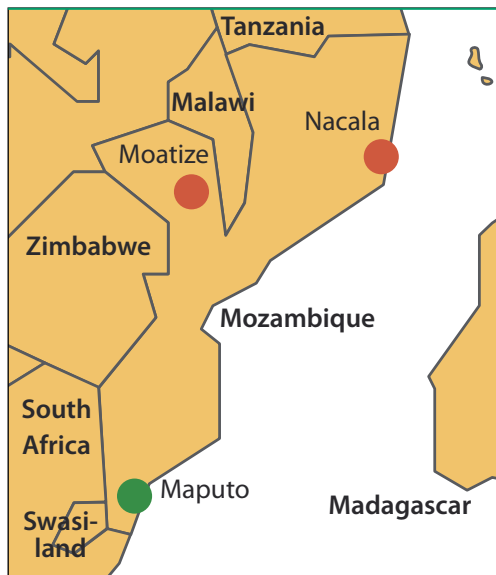
Political elites in Mozambique

The Brazilian government actively promoted Vale's involvement in Mozambique as an example of solidarity between two countries in the global South. Nevertheless, many studies dealing with Africa's South-South relations overestimate the influence of foreign governments and corporations, while presenting Africans as passive recipients. Mozambique's political elites, however, have framed the idea of South-South cooperation in their own way. In resorting to this idea, they referred to ideas of „national development“, „strengthening Mozambique's capacity to act“ or „diversifying the country's foreign relations“ in order to justify Brazil's and other emerging powers' large-scale investments and their costs. At the same time, they used the South-South discourse to strengthen the legitimacy of the FRELIMO government.⁶

During the past ten years, considerable discoveries in Mozambique of coal, natural gas, diamonds, and wood have given rise to optimism about the country's future development. New partnerships with Brazil, China, India, and South Africa to tap these resources were given central importance by the political establishment in Mozambique.⁷ South-South cooperation, it was claimed, would lead Mozambique out of its dependence on Western aid and release an economic dynamic driven by foreign direct investment. Mozambique's presi-

oversaw the company's arrival in the country explained: „Africa is the central west of Brazil.“³ He was alluding to the similarity of the Brazilian savannah-like cerrado biome with the northern and centrally located regions of the southeast African country. Moreover, Mozambique ought to be transformed from an economically backward country into a modern export-oriented country. In connection with the Vale coal mine in the central-western Mozambican district of Moatize, the company constructed the Nacala Logistics Corridor (NLC) rail link, connecting Moatize to the port of Nacala on the Indian Ocean. Here, according to the former Vale executive, the firm made use of its experience in Brazil, where it operates regular passenger train services between Belo Horizonte and the port of Vitória, and between Parauapebas and the port of São Luís.⁴ The new route in Mozambique was presented by Vale as a South-South transfer and expression of social commitment. Many also argue that President Lula da Silva „used Vale“ to promote „solidarity actions“ in Mozambique, as exemplified by his request to Vale executives to help financing the construction of an antiretroviral drug factory to fight HIV/AIDS in Mozambique – a development cooperation project led by the Brazilian state.⁵ At the same time, Vale is believed to have gained contractual advantages thanks to this kind of interconnectedness with the Brazilian government.





dent, Filipe Nyusi, declared: „The development co-operation led by the BRICS countries not only gives a voice to the speechless, but is accompanied by a development agenda that focuses (more) on our needs and priorities.”⁸ Relations with Brazil, including Brazilian foreign investment, were lauded for not being burdened by colonialism, and for breaking the vicious circle of economic dependency.

Recent research also shows, however: The growing importance of these investments have allowed Mozambique's ruling party, FRELIMO, to channel a

considerable number of contractual relations, tax payments and public investments in such a way as to strengthen its own political and economic power. These South-South relations thus represented much more than the transfer of capital and development know-how from Brazil. Vale and the idea of South-South relations also became components of the „FRELIMO party-state”⁹ capable of asserting, expanding, and legitimizing its own power under the guise of „national development”.

Protest and resistance: Local initiatives and their speakers

In addition to Brazil's economic and political commitment and Mozambique's political elites, there is a third, often overlooked factor in these South-South relations. Proximity and solidarity across the South Atlantic have led to grassroots initiatives and local communities to critically question Vale's presence in Mozambique. Representatives of NGOs stress, and this is also documented by research, that the company brings a problematic „baggage” from Brazil to Africa.¹⁰

„Forms of protest anchored in the idea of affinity and mutual solidarity are finding their way across the South Atlantic.”



For example, around 1,300 families were resettled to allow Vale's coal mining operations in the Moatize-Tete region. Critics of the project also refer to the tragic breach of a tailings dam in the small Brazilian town of Brumadinho in January 2019. They see it as evidence of the socially and environmentally reckless misconduct associated with Vale's mining projects at home and abroad. The initiators of protests against the harmful effects of these projects are showing transnational solidarity with the help of the common Portuguese language. „When a body part is injured and has a wound, the whole body feels it,” explained the director of an organization offering legal assistance to mining communities in Tete.¹¹ The people living there – they call themselves Atingidos pela Vale – refer to the idea of South-South relations in order to organize a „cooperation from people to people”. Forms of protest anchored in the idea of affinity and mutual solidarity are finding their way across the South Atlantic and are used to articulate criticism and resistance.¹²

■ Fig. 4: The Nacala Logistics Corridor (NLC) connects the mining region of Moatize with the port city of Nacala (Illustration: Christian Göppner).

■ Fig. 5: Protest in Brazil against the breach of the tailings dam in Brumadinho in January 2019 (Foto: Rodrigo S Coelho / Shutterstock.com)



■ Fig. 6: Hard coal mine in the Moatize district
(Photo: Eric Cezne).



■ Fig. 7: Residential house in a local community
adjacent to Vale's Moatize coal mine (Photo:
Eric Cezne).



Conclusion

Vale's commitment in Mozambique shows in exemplary fashion: Simply affirming or rejecting the thesis that South-South relations have their own character different from established North-South relations, does not do justice to the complex circumstances on the ground. For in both cases one fails to recognize the different, if not contradictory potentials contained in the idea of a South-South cooperation. The ideas and practices derived from this play an important role when it comes to negotiating and distributing the costs and benefits of the extraction of mineral resources, for example. Most of the research work dealing with foreign business investments in Africa is still focussed on Western companies. However, it is just as important to get more involved in the diverse South-South commitments emanating from China, Brazil, and other countries of the Global South. They are in the process of actively shaping the future of the African continent, and beyond.

¹ Vale, Brazil (4th place); Shenhua Energy, China (5th place); Coal India, India (7th place); and China Molybdenum, China (8th place) (Statista, June 2019).

² The current government under President Jair Bolsonaro represents perhaps the biggest break with Brazil's long-standing strategy of strengthening external relations within the global South. Instead, it has sought greater proximity to politically right-wing governments in the North, especially the USA.

³ In an interview in São Paulo, Brazil, in April 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more details, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-aids-mozambique-brazil-dc/brazil-offers-drug-factory-to-aids-ravaged-mozambique-idUKL2957933720070529>

⁶ FRELIMO is an acronym of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Mozambican Liberation Front). The liberation movement, founded in 1962, led the armed struggle against the Portuguese colonial power and achieved Mozambique's independence in 1975. It has been a political party since 1977, and continues to govern the country to this day.

⁷ See C. Alden, S. Chichava: China and Mozambique: From Comrades to Capitalists. Pretoria 2014.

⁸ Angola e Moçambique querem apoio dos BRICS, Deutsche Welle 27.07.2018. www.dw.com/pt-002/angola-e-mozambique-querem-apoio-dos-brics/a-44857262

⁹ J. Sumich: The Party and the State: Frelimo and Social Stratification in Post-socialist Mozambique. Development and Change (2010), 41 (4), 679-698. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01653.x

¹⁰ According to an interlocutor in an interview (São Paulo, April 2019) conducted as part of the INFRAGLOB project.

¹¹ According to the representative of an NGO in an interview conducted in 2018 in Tete, Mozambique, as part of the INFRAGLOB case study.

¹² See Cezne 2019 in the Recommended readings for more.

Africa's infrastructure and the Global South

The EU research project INFRAGLOB

In March 2018, the research project INFRAGLOB started under the direction of Prof. Dr. Jana Hönke. It deals with the question of how emerging powers in the Global South challenge the traditional practice of international relations, but also their understanding. The research work is carried out under the theme „Africa's Infrastructure Globalities – Rethinking Political Geographies from the Global South“ and will be funded over five years by the European Research Council (ERC) with an ERC Starting Grant.

It will follow infrastructure projects in the Global South, in particular in the area of the natural resources exploitation, and in rail and ship logistics. In these areas, Chinese and Brazilian companies are currently some of the most important investors in Africa. They introduce new corporate governance practices and often shape their relationships with social actors differently to Western norms and expectations. Of particular interest is the question of what influence these actors from the South have on current efforts to regulate transnational corporate relations under social and ethical aspects.

INFRAGLOB examines these questions „from below“: It uses sociological and anthropological approaches to identify changes that arise from the day-to-day negotiation and implementation

of projects and standards. The research work focuses in particular on Chinese and Brazilian port and mining projects on the African continent. The researchers follow the engineers and community managers who carry out these projects in Africa, but also mediate between company headquarters and transnational forums on social regulation. INFRAGLOB also looks at the specific transnational mobilisation against large-scale economic projects in South-South relations, and asks how these (can) influence social and ethical aspects. This SPEKTRUM contribution is the result of a case study on Vale's involvement in Mozambique.



RECOMMENDED LINK



Project No.: 795798

INFRAGLOB

www.infraglob.eu



■ Fig. 1: Bauxite is loaded onto railway wagons and transported to the port of Kamsar in Guinea. Most of the bauxite is exported to China (sst).



■ Fig. 2: A cargo ship in the port of Kamsar is loaded with bauxite, aluminium, and iron ore (sst).